

Help! (film)

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Directed by	Richard Lester
Produced by	Walter Shenson
Written by	Charles Wood Marc Behm (story)
Starring	John Lennon Paul McCartney George Harrison Ringo Starr Leo McKern Eleanor Bron John Bluthal Patrick Cargill Victor Spinetti Roy Kinnear Mal Evans
Music by	The Beatles George Martin Ken Thorne
Cinematography	David Watkin
Editing by	John Victor Smith
Distributed by	United Artists Apple Films
Release date(s)	July 29, 1965
Running time	92 min. original running time 111 min.
Country	United Kingdom
Language	English

Help! is a 1965 film directed by Richard Lester, starring The Beatles—John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr—and featuring Leo McKern, Eleanor Bron, Victor Spinetti, John Bluthal, Roy Kinnear and Patrick Cargill. The soundtrack was released as an album, also called *Help!*.

The photojournalist Michael Peto was commissioned to take still photographs during the making of the film. They were recognised at the time for their candid and expressive quality. In 2004, more than 40 of his unpublished photographs of The Beatles were discovered during a digitisation project of his work. These were exhibited in 2007-2008 at the National Museums Liverpool.

Synopsis

Part One

An eastern cult (a parody of the Thuggee cult) is about to sacrifice a woman to the (fictional) goddess 'Kaili'. Just as she is about to be killed they notice that she is not wearing the sacrificial ring. Ringo Starr, drummer of The Beatles, has it; sent to him by the victim and her sister, who is also the high priestess of the cult (both of whom are fans of The Beatles), it is on his finger. Determined to retrieve the ring and sacrifice the woman, the great Swami Clang (McKern), the high priestess Ahme (Bron) and several cult members including Bhuta (Bluthal) leave for London. After several failed attempts to steal the ring, they confront him in an Indian restaurant. Ringo learns that if he does not return the ring soon, he will become the next sacrifice. Ringo then discovers that the ring is stuck on his finger.

Next, they seek a jeweller to remove it but the tools he uses all break on the ring. In a desperate effort to remove the ring, the band resorts to the bumbling efforts of a mad scientist, Foot (Spinetti) and his assistant Algernon (Kinnear). His laboratory is full of surplus British made equipment and Foot despises anything British. When his equipment turns out to have no effect on the ring, Foot decides that he, too, must have it. Before he can do anything else, Ahme comes in with a pink Walther P-38 pistol, rescues the group and they return home.

Ahme, now revealed as being on the group's side, tells the group that her sister's time has passed and she is now out of danger. Ringo is now the sacrifice victim. Ahme proposes to inject Ringo with a potion that is derived from the essence of certain orchids and would shrink his finger so the ring would come off. She tells Ringo to be brave and suggests, to the camera, that if he had been brave; "none of this would have been necessary".

Intermission

The boys are seen in a field, jumping up and down.

Part Two

Ahme's sister is taking a bath and getting the red paint off.

Part Three

Ringo lies nervously on the couch, waiting for the injection. But before Ahme can proceed, the gang starts to pound on the doors. Startled, Ahme drops the needle into Paul's leg and he shrinks instead. Cutting from "The Exciting Adventure of Paul on The Floor", the thugs break into the room and a fight ensues. Ahme flees. Ringo is doused with red paint (he has to be painted red in order for him to be sacrificed), thus ruining his best suit and causing him to cry and a swordsman approaches. Foot comes in, shoots a warning shot with his Webley and scares the man away. The gang retreats and Foot makes his attempt to take the ring. Paul unshrinks and John subsequently starts to swing a lamp at Foot who tries to shoot him, but his gun misfires. Blaming this on the fact that the gun is British made, Foot retreats. The boys are left to sort things out.

The band flees to the Austrian Alps for refuge but both thugs and Foot follow in pursuit. As the Beatles participate in a game of curling, Foot and Algernon booby trap one of the curling stones with a bomb. George sees the "fiendish thingy" and tells everyone to run. The bomb eventually goes off after a delay, creating a big hole in the ice in which a swimmer (Mal Evans) emerges and asks directions to the White Cliffs of Dover. Next, Swami skis down a slope that Ahme told him was the way to get to further pursue the Beatles, but turns out to be the take-off ramp for a Ski jumping contest. Swami is the winner, and inadvertently gets held up by receiving a gold medal. The group escapes back to England and they ask for "protection" from Scotland Yard; and get it in the form of a cowardly Inspector (Cargill). After being attacked whilst recording in the middle of Salisbury Plain surrounded by the British Army, they hide in "A Well Known Palace" (Buckingham Palace) until they are almost captured by Foot.

The group step into a small pub, where Swami appears to be working. After being served beer, Ringo cannot pick his glass up from the table, so George tips it over, unknowingly opening a trapdoor to the cellar that Swami set up. Inside the cellar is a broken ladder and a tiger. They go to summon the Inspector, and tell them to sing the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's 9th Symphony to the tiger in order to tame it, while everyone outside the pub hears the melody, and joins in. Disguised, the Beatles take a plane to the Bahamas, followed by Scotland Yard officers, Foot and Clang. After Ringo is nearly captured, the other Beatles pose as him in order to lure the cult members, who are then arrested by the Bahamas Police. Despite their best efforts, Ringo is captured by Foot, who takes him on to a ship intending to cut off his finger to get the ring.

Ahme rescues Ringo by giving Foot the same orchid essence shrinking solution in exchange. The two try to escape the ship by jumping into the water, however Ringo cannot swim. They are captured by the cult and tied down on the beach where they are surrounded by two battalions of Kukhri Rifles. Clang begins the ceremony to sacrifice Ringo, after telling him that the cult members are prepared to attack the rest of the Beatles and police when they come to the rescue and that if Ringo attempts to warn them he will die instantly.

Ringo manages to untie himself and tries to wave to his band mates to warn them away. With this act of courage, the ring falls from his finger. He puts the ring on Clang's hand, saying "Get sacrificed! I don't subscribe to your religion!" Ahme declares that Clang will be the next sacrifice, as he is wearing the ring. The movie ends with *Help!* playing one last time and everyone running around. Clang manages to remove the ring and gives it to Foot and Algernon. They, however, leave the ring in the sand while the police rush about arresting the cult while The Beatles playfully run around; the ring ends up on Bhuta's finger and *he* becomes the target for sacrifice; meanwhile, Mal Evans swims toward the beach and once again, asks for directions to the White Cliffs of Dover. The movie ends with a dedication to "Elias Howe, who, in 1846, invented the sewing machine".

The credits feature the characters acting up in front of the camera, with the jewel of the ring being placed in front of the lens. The music playing during the credits is the Overture of *The Barber of Seville* by Gioachino Rossini, with The Beatles adding their own laughing and comments.

Inspiration

The Beatles said the film was inspired by the Marx Brothers classic *Duck Soup*; it was also directly satirical of the James Bond series of films. At the time of the original release of *Help!*, its distributor, United Artists, also held the rights to the Bond series (now owned by UA sister studio MGM.)

Production

According to interviews conducted with Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr for *The Beatles Anthology*, director Richard Lester was given a larger budget for this film than he had for *A Hard Day's Night*, thanks to the commercial success of the latter. Thus, this feature film was in colour and was shot on several exotic foreign locations. It was also given a fuller musical score than *A Hard Day's Night*, provided by a full orchestra, and including pieces of well known classical music: Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Act III Overture, Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Ode to Joy), and, during the end credits and with their own comic vocal interpretation, Rossini's *Barber of Seville* overture. The original title for the film — only changed to *Help!* very near to its release — was *Eight Arms To Hold You*.^[1]

Help! was set in London, Salisbury Plain, the Austrian Alps, New Providence Island and Paradise Island in the Bahamas and Twickenham Film Studios, beginning in the Bahamas on 23 February 1965. Starr commented in *The Beatles Anthology* that they were in the Bahamas for the hot weather scenes, and therefore had to wear light clothing even though it was rather cold. Tony Bramwell, the assistant to Beatles manager Brian Epstein, stated in his book *A Magical Mystery Tour* that Epstein chose the Bahamas for tax reasons. According to *The Beatles Anthology*, during the restaurant sequence filmed in early April, George began to discover Indian-style music, which would be a key

element in future songs such as "Norwegian Wood". Filming finished on 14 April at Ailsa Avenue in Twickenham. The Beatles did not particularly enjoy the filming of the movie, nor were they pleased with the end product. In 1970, John Lennon said they felt like extras in their own movie.

"The movie was out of our control. With *A Hard Day's Night*, we had a lot of input, and it was semi-realistic. But with *Help!*, Dick Lester didn't tell us what it was all about.

—John Lennon on filming *Help!*

Ten years later Lennon was more charitable:^[2]

I realize, looking back, how advanced it was. It was a precursor to the *Batman* "Pow! Wow!" on TV--that kind of stuff. But [Lester] never explained it to us. Partly, maybe, because we hadn't spent a lot of time together between *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, and partly because we were smoking marijuana for breakfast during that period. Nobody could communicate with us, it was all glazed eyes and giggling all the time. In our own world. It's like doing nothing most of the time, but still having to rise at 7 am, so we became bored.

A contributing factor was exhaustion attributable to their busy schedule of writing, recording and touring. Afterward they were hesitant to begin another film project, and indeed *Help!* was their last full-length scripted theatrical film. Their obligation for a third film to United Artists was met by the 1970 documentary film *Let It Be*. The 1968 animated film *Yellow Submarine* did not meet contractual obligations because it did not star the Beatles, and their only live appearance was featured for less than two minutes at the film's conclusion.

"Haze of marijuana"

The Beatles later said the film was shot in a "haze of marijuana". According to Starr's interviews in *The Beatles Anthology*, during the Austrian Alps film shooting, he and McCartney ran off over the hill from the "curling" scene set to smoke a joint.

"A hell of a lot of pot was being smoked while we were making the film. It was great. That helped make it a lot of fun...In one of the scenes, Victor Spinetti and Roy Kinnear are playing curling: sliding along those big stones. One of the stones has a bomb in it and we find out that it's going to blow up, and have to run away. Well, Paul and I ran about seven miles, we ran and ran, just so we could stop and have a joint before we came back. We could have run all the way to Switzerland. If you look at pictures of us you can see a lot of red-eyed shots; they were red from the dope we were smoking. And these were those clean-cut boys! Dick Lester knew that very little would get done after lunch. In the afternoon we very seldom got past the first line of the script. We had such hysterics that no one could do anything. Dick Lester would say, 'No, boys, could we do it again?' It was just that we had a lot of fun — a lot of fun in those days."

—Ringo Starr

In the *Beatles Anthology Director's Cut*, Harrison admitted that they were smoking marijuana on the plane ride all the way to the Bahamas.

McCartney also shared some of his memories of when they were filming *Help!*:

"We showed up a bit stoned, smiled a lot and hoped we'd get through it. We giggled a lot. I remember one time at Cliveden (Lord Astor's place, where the Christine Keeler/Profumo scandal went on); we were filming the Buckingham Palace scene where we were all supposed to have our hands up. It was after lunch, which was fatal because someone might have brought out a glass of wine as well. We were all a bit merry and all had our backs to the camera and the giggles set in. All we had to do was turn around and look amazed, or something. But every time we'd turn round to the camera there were tears streaming down our faces. It's OK to get the giggles anywhere else but in films, because the technicians get pissed off with you. They think, 'They're not very professional.' Then you start thinking, 'This isn't very professional — but we're having a great laugh.'"

—Paul McCartney

"John did once offer me a joint. And I obligingly tried to take a little puff. I knew there was some special way of doing it — but I don't smoke anyway. So I took a little puff and then thought, "This is so expensive. I mustn't waste it!" And gave it back to him. So that's your definition of naïve, I think. "

—Eleanor Bron

The photographer Michael Peto was commissioned in 1965 to take still photographs during the making of the film; these became known for their candid and expressive quality. During the digitisation of the Michael Peto Collection at the University of Dundee in 2004, researchers discovered more than 40 previously unpublished photographs of the Beatles taken during the making of *Help!*. These were exhibited in *Now These Days Are Gone: The Beatles Photographs of Michael Peto, 18 August 2007 to 2 March 2008* at the National Conservation Centre, Liverpool.^[3]

Songs

The song titles that appear in the film are:

- "Help!"
- "You're Going to Lose That Girl"
- "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away"
- "Ticket to Ride"
- "I Need You"
- "The Night Before"
- "Another Girl"
- "She's A Woman" (heard in the background, on a tape machine, and underground in the Salisbury Plain scene)
- "A Hard Day's Night" (played by Indian band and as an instrumental)
- "I'm Happy Just to Dance with You" (played by a band during the bike-riding scene)
- "You Can't Do That" (played as an instrumental during the Austrian Alps sequence)

The seven main songs formed the first side of the British release of the *Help!* album. The second half consisted of other new Beatles songs recorded at the same time.

Critical response

Critical opinion at the time of release was generally positive, but the film has not aged as well as *A Hard Day's Night*. Leslie Halliwell describes it as an

[e]xhausting attempt to outdo *A Hard Day's Night* in lunatic frenzy, which goes to show that some talents work best on low budgets. The humour is a frantic cross between *Hellzapoppin'*, The Goons, Goofy, Mr. Magoo and the shade of Monty Python to come. It looks good but becomes too tiresome to entertain.^[4]

Allmovie's Ronnie D. Lankford, Jr. describes it as

... a forerunner to music videos. ... Lester seemed to find the right tone for *Help!*, creating an enjoyable portrait of the Beatles and never allowing the film to take itself too seriously. His style would later be co-opted by Bob Rafelson [*sic*] for the Monkees' television series in the '60s and has continued to influence rock musicals like *Spice World* in 1998.^[5]

Novelisation

A novelisation entitled *The Beatles in Help!* was written by Al Hine and published by Dell in 1965.

A sequence featuring Frankie Howerd and Wendy Richard was filmed but left out of final editing owing to its length. However, the sequence was left in the film novelisation.

Release history

Like *A Hard Day's Night*, *Help!* was originally distributed theatrically by United Artists - the company handled distribution from 1965 to the end of 1980. In January 1981, rights to the movie reverted from UA to producer Walter Shenson, and the movie was withdrawn from circulation.

Help! was released several times in different video formats by MPI Home Video and The Criterion Collection. On VHS, a version was released during February 1987 through MPI, along with a reissue of *A Hard Day's Night* the very same day, and was followed by a special-edition release on October 31, 1995. MPI also issued a CLV laserdisc in 1995 and two releases on DVD, the first as a single DVD release on November 12, 1997 and the second as part of *The Beatles DVD Collector's Set* on August 8, 2000.



LaserDisc releases include a Criterion CAV laserdisc and a Voyager CLV laserdisc in 1987, each of which had three pressings. The first pressings had no UPC on the gatefold covers while the other two had the UPC either as a sticker or printed directly on the jacket.

The film's transfer on the CAV laserdiscs was done correctly so that no blending of frames occurs and thus movements are not blurry. The supplemental section, which, with few exceptions, has never been available on any other home video release, contains the following:

- original theatrical trailer (which includes deleted scenes)
- silent home movie footage of the film set and of the world premiere
- still photos, some of which are introduced by text describing the production history of the film
- posters
- sheet music
- record jackets
- radio ads (on audio during the silent footage)
- an open interview, originally designed for disc jockeys. By reading prompts on the screen, one can pretend to talk to the Beatles.

In June 2007, a version of *Help!*, sub-titled in Korean, became available on Amazon.com. However, by July 2007, all home video versions of the film were pulled from the market because of rights issues involving Apple Corps - now the full rights holders to the film. The rights issues were eventually resolved and Apple Corps/EMI/Capitol released a new double DVD version with a fully restored film negative and newly remixed in 2.0 stereo and 5.1 surround sound of the film. This came in standard 2xDVD packaging and 2xDVD deluxe edition box set on October 30, 2007 in the UK and November 6, 2007 in America.^[6] This latest release contains new featurettes, three trailers (one of which is in Spanish), and the aforementioned radio ads carried over from the Criterion LaserDisc issue.

Notes

- [1] Matthews, Brian. "Part 7," *The Beatles Story* (BBC, 1973).
- [2] Sheff, David. *All We Are Saying*. 2000, St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-25464-4, p. 176
- [3] "Now These Days Are Gone: The Beatles Photographs of Michael Peto, 18 August 2007 to 2 March 2008" (<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/conservation/exhibitions/beatles/>), National Conservation Centre, National Museums Liverpool, 31 Jul 2007, accessed 5 Sep 2010
- [4] Halliwell, Leslie (1997). *Halliwell's Film and Video Guide*. London: Harper Collins. p. 338. ISBN 0006387799.
- [5] "Help!" (<http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=1:22130~T1>). . Retrieved 2008-11-24.
- [6] "Stop worrying...Help! is on the way" (<http://www.emigroup.com/Press/2007/press60.htm>). EMI Group Limited. 2007-09-04. . Retrieved 2009-05-23.

External links

- *Help!* (http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/beatles_the_help/) at Rotten Tomatoes
 - The Beatles (<http://www.thebeatles.com>)
 - *Help!* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0059260/>) at the Internet Movie Database
 - *Help!* (<http://www.allmovie.com/work/22130>) at Allmovie
 - Beatles Laserdiscs (<http://www.rarebeatles.com/photopg5/laserd.htm>)
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